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Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 13, 2012

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As End of Session Looms

Midwest Dairy Coalition Urges Congress to Pass New Farm Bill

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Midwest Dairy Coalition today strongly urged Congress to take action on a Farm Bill that has failed to move forward even as current dairy programs have expired.

The bill is among many measures left unresolved and vying for attention, as members return from the campaign trail to Washington this week. With only a few weeks to go, the Midwest Dairy Coalition is asking Congress to avoid further harm to farmers at a time when high feed costs have already put a strain on dairy operations. Lack of Congressional action would mean the debate over dairy provisions and other facets of the Farm Bill would need to start all over again in the new Congress.

“The Midwest Dairy Coalition has stated previously that it supports the dairy provisions of the Senate-passed Farm Bill, as well as the Farm Bill passed by the House Agriculture Committee,” says Steve Etko, coordinator, Midwest Dairy Coalition. “However, the bill has not progressed, leaving dairy farmers without an effective program.”

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Etka said there has been no clear signal from House leadership that the bill will be brought to the floor for a vote before this Congress adjourns, leaving an uncertain future as farmers continue to cope with costly effects of the summer's widespread drought. On September 30, the MILC program expired, leaving dairy farmers vulnerable without an effective safety net at a time when they already faced significant challenges over high feed costs.

Etka noted that the dairy provisions included in the proposed new Farm Bill would actually reduce government expenditures compared to current policy. "That price tag should appeal to those lawmakers highly concerned with the Farm Bill's impact on the deficit," he adds. "We are strongly urging that Congress not miss the opportunity to act on this Farm Bill in the coming weeks."

Etka said there are several avenues Congress could take in regards to the Farm Bill as the year draws to a close. While the Coalition continues to push strongly for passage of a new Farm Bill, members could instead elect to extend the current measure, pushing the debate into the new Congress next year and starting the process all over again. As with passage of a new bill, an extension would also avoid consequences of complete inaction which would trigger reversion back to 1949 Ag Law, raising havoc with current markets not only in dairy, but other ag commodities as well, at taxpayer expense.

"Congress could decline to take any action at all, just as we've seen the past several months," Etka confirmed. "Such inaction would be to the detriment of the nation's dairy farm families, as well as other taxpayers. Congress shouldn't squander away two years of work on the new Farm Bill by pushing the debate into a new year and forcing the process to start all over again. Passage of a new Farm Bill is the best route by far and we urge members of Congress to move forward on this important piece of legislation."

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The Midwest Dairy Coalition is an alliance of farmer-owned dairy cooperatives representing dairy farmers in eight Upper Midwest states. The Coalition collectively represents nearly 11,000 dairy farmers or about 20 percent of those in the nation. Representing a large majority of dairy farmers in the Upper Midwest, the Coalition provides an effective and useful forum for discussion, debate and common action on dairy issues of the day.